

Waste water at your own cost!

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Water is essential for life but Malaysians seem to have taken for granted their water resources, not realizing that when water is polluted, consumers will be the ones to bear with rising cost and poor quality water supply.



Indiscriminate littering seems to be the way of life for many Malaysians who are oblivious to the dire consequences of their actions although water remains an essential part for the survival of human beings.

Many Malaysians or even many people around the world seem to have taken their water resources for granted but do not realize that when water is polluted, consumers will have to bear with rising cost and poor quality of water supply.

Their rubbish, most likely, will end up in waterways, choking the rivers and streams, and polluting water, thus causing extensive damage to the environment and living habitat.

However, it is not the litterbugs alone who poison the rivers since there are other perpetrators like industries, businesses and even the farming community.

Thus, the rivers are choked not only with rubbish but also industrial waste, toxic waste, animal carcasses, sewage and whatever that makes its way into the rivers.

The statistics provided by Natural Resources and Environment Ministry pointed out only 306 rivers in the country remain categorized as clean in 2009 compared with 334 rivers in 2008.

The number categorized as polluted in 2009 increased by six to 54 compared with the previous year.

Many discard all sorts of waste indiscriminately for their convenience with the typical mentality 'as long it's not within my property it's alright'. But just how many are aware that they have to pay someone to clean up the mess that they have caused.

The polluted rivers still serve as the water intake source for water treatment plants.

"So to clean the filthy rivers somebody has to pay, indirectly through the water tariffs?

"The more polluted the rivers are, the more we have to spend to clean the water. Often the taxpayer's money is used to clean up the rivers. In other words, our destructive attitude to the environment will return to haunt us in a different ways," warned the President of the Association of Water and Energy Research Malaysia (AWER) S. Piarapakaran,

Many domestic consumers are least concerned with their water bills, unlike the electric and telephone bills, maybe because they make up just a small amount.

However, as a responsible consumer it would be wise to know how the water tariff is calculated, that incorporates the water treatment and supply cost.

The cost involved, he explained can be divided into the cost of raw water, the treatment cost and the cost of supplying the water.

The cost of raw water, he said is imposed in various forms and serves as a source of income for the state governments.

"The more lower the water quality, the higher the treatment cost. Among the cost components involved are workers, chemicals, operation, maintenance and many more.

"Lastly is the cost of supplying the water itself that encompasses the cost of operations, human resources and maintenance. The different cost components will be tabulated and the tariff value will be calculated," added Piarapakaran.

"However, in future the charges should be imposed according to the quality of the raw water.

As the water resources come under the state government, the onus is on the state to provide good quality raw water.

"If the quality of the raw water depreciates, thus the cost of raw water must be reduced as well," he said.

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This, explained Piarapakaran, will provide economic value for water and assist the state government in conducting an economic analysis on water.

When raw water quality depreciates, the cost to treat water goes up! This cost can also be considered as a shortage in usable water that can even unleash a water crisis.

According to Piarapakaran, the efforts to gazette water catchment areas as permanent reserves have been very slow.

He said Malaysia would one-day face water shortage if the authorities fail to mitigate the pollution of our waterways and gazette the water catchment areas.

Piarapakaran referred to an incident involving the Sungai Semenyih Water Treatment Plant that was forced to shut down due to ammonia contamination in September 2010.

The incident left 1.2 million consumers without water in four Selangor districts - Petaling Jaya, Hulu Langat, Sepang and Kuala Langat.

According to Piarapakaran, the incident at the Sungai Semenyih Water Treatment Plant is a good example of how the water supply can be disrupted.

"Sungai Kembong and Sungai Beranang are catchment areas for this treatment plant and the nearby landfill poses a serious problem for this treatment plant.

"What happened is that the retaining walls of the landfill along Sungai Kembong collapsed, causing ammonia leakage to flow into the river."

He noted that this could have been easily managed if there was an efficient waste disposal scheme.

"In developed countries they have successfully reduced waste. And reducing waste should start right from home," he said.

When water supply is disrupted due to pollution, it involves cost.

As explained by Piarapakaran, a brief cost analysis can be made out of the water supply disruption.

"For this costing, we take one million consumers. Each consumer using 200 liters of water daily with the lowest tariff rate of RM0.57 per cubic meter.

"We will find a lost of revenue amounting to RM 114,000 per day. If this water supply cut continues for several days, definitely this loss will multiply into a big amount," he explained.

Domestic consumers may not feel the cost involved in water disruption but how about the industries, freshwater fish breeders, restaurants and other commercial entities because any disruption in water supply also involves other costs that one may not realize or often ignore - human resources, water tanker services, loss suffered by industries, the cost to clean up the pollution and not forgetting the inconvenience of the consumers.

"Who will pay for all these costs? If those who are contributors to this problem don't pay, the consumers have to bear the brunt in the form of tariffs.

"Say the water pollution increases by 10 per cent but the cost of treating the water with chemicals may increase much higher, 20 or even 30 per cent as more chemical is needed.

"The cost of these chemicals often go up and this will be reflected in the tariff cost. The taxpayer's money is used to clean the water," said Piarapakaran.

"When we pollute the environment, we are actually releasing more chemicals into the environment. And with more chemicals released, the natural buffering capacity of the environment is lost."

Nonetheless, the water supply is dependent on the environment and we are the ones who will decide if our water supply is of quality.

Therefore, each time when someone thinks of littering water, then think again.

It not only reflects a third class mentality but threatens our own well-being!